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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 KUWAIT 000724

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [KU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL PETRAEUS' VISIT TO KUWAIT

REF: A. KUWAIT 675
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 676
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 689
[1](#)D. KUWAIT 714

Classified By: DCM Tom Williams for reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. Key Points:

-- (C) Our bilateral mil-mil relationship with Kuwait is strong; active FMS cases amount to USD 8.1 billion and Kuwaiti AIK for OIF exceeds USD one billion annually;
-- (C) While concerned about the security implications of a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, the GoK will likely need convincing to see it in its security interest to support USG OEF operations at the levels it has for OIF;
-- (C) Efforts to see Baghdad emerge from Chapter VII sanctions are viewed as premature here given unresolved and politically volatile issues such as border encroachments, accounting for Kuwait's MIAs, and return of its national archives;
-- (S) Although still lacking comprehensive CT legislation, Kuwaiti cooperation in this area has improved markedly, particularly in the past six months, with MoI Shaykh Jaber saying he has received a mandate to discipline and focus his ministry to deal with what "all (in the GoK) now recognized" is a serious global terrorism threat (REF D);
-- (S) The GoK views Iran with suspicion and seeks reassurance regarding USG intentions; cooperation against Iranian intelligence activities here is good, even in the absence of credible evidence of any real Iranian inroads into Kuwait's well-integrated Shi'a population;
-- (C) Domestic politics have entered a period of relative calm, following May parliamentary elections that weakened Islamist/tribalist influence and placed four moderate women -- a Kuwaiti first -- in parliament;
-- (C) Kuwait has built a rehabilitation center for religious extremists and will be deeply disappointed in the event of a U.S. decision not to transfer four Kuwaiti GTMO detainees to GoK control.

[1](#)2. (C) General Petraeus, welcome back to Kuwait. While the Amir, Prime Minister, and many other senior leaders will be out of the country or unavailable as a result of the Ascension Day holiday, we continue to pursue available interlocutors and expect you will at minimum meet with First Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense Shaykh Jaber Al Sabah and Lt. General Ahmed Khalid Al Sabah, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kuwait Armed Forces. The following is overview of the major issues before the GoK at this time: the impact on Kuwait of the U.S. drawdown in Iraq, future U.S. military engagement with Kuwait, concerns about Iran, CT cooperation, and the return of Kuwaiti Guantanamo detainees.

Kuwait Political Scene

3.(C) You return to Kuwait at a time that is relatively quiet

politically. Parliamentary elections in May diminished somewhat the strength of Islamists and tribalists and put in office, for the first time, four U.S.-educated female MPs, an indication that Kuwait's democracy continues to evolve in a positive direction. The government survived handily a July 1 no-confidence motion against Interior Minister Shaykh Jaber Al Sabah raised by Islamists and tribalists, an outcome that has strengthened the government's hand and may presage a somewhat more cooperative relationship between the executive and legislative branches when parliament reconvenes in October. This breathing space should allow the government an opportunity to focus on pushing forward in the fall a legislative package centered on economic reform; we have also encouraged the government to move ahead on counter-terrorism legislation and anti-Trafficking in Persons (TIP) legislation.

Iraq and More Iraq

14. (C) Iraq remains Kuwait's existential concern, with efforts intended to see Baghdad emerge from under Chapter VII sanctions seen here as premature given Iraq's apparent lack of commitment to the common land border designated by UNSCR 833 and to resolving issues concerning Iraqi debt, fully accounting for Kuwaiti missing from the 1990 war, and returning Kuwait's stolen national archives. The GOK has signaled both privately and publicly that it might be willing to negotiate on debt and compensation issues once the boundary demarcation issue is definitively resolved. GOK concerns over Iraq's lobbying campaign have been somewhat mollified by assurances from the USG (during a

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recent visit by A/AS Feltman - refs A and B) and other P-3 members that the land border as designated by UNSCR 833 is not subject to reinterpretation. The UN has taken the lead in brokering a compromise between Iraq and Kuwait on compensation issues and we have quietly urged the GOK to be as forthcoming as possible -- in Kuwait's own long-term interest -- in order to bring Iraq back into the international fold. A recent visit by Iraq's Parliament Speaker, Iyad Al-Samaraie, helped tamp down a public war of words between MPs in both countries and floated publicly the idea of swapping Iraqi debt for investment opportunities, once the border is issue is put to rest (ref C), although his assurances were later criticized by Iraqi FM Zebari. Your interlocutors may raise this issue with you and note that Kuwait requires tangible signs of Iraq's commitment to the border, including the removal of Iraqi farmers from Kuwaiti soil and Iraqi facilitation of border pillar maintenance. A decision by Iraq to name an ambassador to Kuwait would also be a welcome sign of good faith.

15. (C) Your interlocutors will welcome your assessment of how the U.S. drawdown in Iraq is progressing and how this may impact Kuwait's future security. The GOK remains deeply concerned about the potential for lingering of even increased instability in Iraq after the withdrawal of US combat forces. Kuwaitis are well aware of the substantial support they have provided to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) over the years -- amounting annually to over USD one billion in such benefits as free access to bases, waived port and air support fees, customs waivers, subsidized fuel and other services -- as well as the facilitated passage of U.S. troops in and out of Iraq, and they worry that this assistance may be discounted as we withdraw from Iraq and turn our attention to other arenas, including Afghanistan/Pakistan. Any assurances you can offer of a long-term USG commitment to Kuwait's security and of a continued robust mil-mil relationship will be welcome. That said, we in recent days have seen for the first time public criticism (albeit by an Islamist MP, but one writing in the country's largest circulation newspaper) regarding the cost to Kuwait of continuing support for USG OIF efforts; the GOK will desire assurances of ongoing US protection and will

certainly seek as a consequence a continued US military presence here, but whether the GoK will see it in its own security interests to support USG OEF efforts at or anywhere near the very high levels it has for OIF is in doubt.

Wary About Iran

¶16. (S) The GOK has kept a low public profile on the recent disturbances in Iran, reflecting a traditional Kuwaiti posture of attempting to avoid inciting its larger and more aggressive neighbors. The Kuwaitis nonetheless do regard Iran as a threat; cooperation against Iranian intelligence targets is good, even in the absence of any compelling evidence that Tehran has made much headway with the one-third of Kuwaitis who are Shi'a -- in part a reflection of how well the Shi'a here are integrated into Kuwait's generous social welfare state. The GoK will welcome clarification of USG intentions towards Iran, but Kuwait is as much worried by the possibility of destabilizing military action against Tehran as it is of what it fears may be naive diplomatic engagement.

Reflecting this ambivalence, Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed -- who spent twelve years as ambassador to Tehran -- recently told AA/S Feltman that, while dialogue on Iran's nuclear program was the only option, he did not believe any amount of persuasion would convince Iran to accept international supervision.

Military to Military Relationship

¶17. (C) The US/GOK military to military relationship is generally excellent, and Kuwait's Ministry of Defense (MOD) supports a continued U.S. military presence. Kuwait purchases a significant portion of its defense articles through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program, with over USD 8.1 billion in active cases. Additionally, the Office of Military Cooperation-Kuwait (OMC-K) actively supports Kuwait's desired increase in bilateral training and exercises between the U.S. and Kuwaiti militaries. However, the size of the U.S. military presence is up for debate. KMOD desires a presence consistent with pre-OIF levels. The Kuwaiti Armed Forces (KAF) has expressed a desire that U.S. forces be centralized at Camp Arifjan, and that the Logistics Support Area (LSA) and Camp Virginia be terminated. KAF also plans for our presence to be reduced at Kuwait Navy Base, Camp Buerhing, the Aerial and Sea Ports of Debarkation, and Ali Al-Salem Air Base.

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¶18. (C) The U.S. military presence in Kuwait is governed by the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). The U.S. and Kuwait entered into the DCA on 19 September 1991, which set forth the terms of the United States' use of Kuwaiti facilities, logistical support, prepositioning of defense materials, and the status of U.S. forces in Kuwait. The DCA had an initial term of ten years, and was extended for ten years in April 2001. At the conclusion of the extension, the DCA will continue in force indefinitely unless terminated by either party on one year's written notice. While a long-term renewal would be advantageous, I believe the U.S. should not attempt to renegotiate the terms of the DCA because they are already so favorable to the U.S.

¶19. (C) Our future footprint and posture here has not been broached with the Kuwaiti leadership in any detail. As noted in para five above, if we seek to continue Kuwaiti logistical support and refunnel it to sustain our AF/PAK effort, your challenge will be to persuade them this remains a good investment.

CT Cooperation

¶10. (C) Even in the absence of a comprehensive CT law, Kuwait has taken significant steps in the past six months to detain, monitor, and support the detention of known terrorist facilitators. Kuwait's Interior Minister, Shaykh Jaber

Khalid Al Sabah, told me July 7 that he has been given the mandate to discipline and refocus his ministry given a general acceptance and recognition of the global nature of the terrorist threat; he mentioned an ongoing enhanced surveillance program as one manifestation of this effort. Kuwait's money laundering law, passed in 2002, does not specifically criminalize terrorist financing, but Kuwait has frozen the assets of UN 1267-listed individuals, including the three Kuwaiti terrorist facilitators Jaber Al-Jalahmah, Mubarak Mishkhis Sanad Al-Bathali, and Hamid Al-Ali, designated in January 2008. Later that year, Kuwait approached the UN 1267 Committee for permission to unblock the salaries of the three on humanitarian grounds. Reportedly, Al-Bathali's daughter is also blocked from opening an account.

¶11. (C) The U.S. has engaged the GOK for over four years on designation of the Kuwait-based Islamic NGO Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), including its overseas branch offices, under EO 13224 and UNSCR 1267. The GOK cooperated with a U.S. investigation into RIHS immediately after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but recent bilateral cooperation has been limited. In June 2008 the U.S. Treasury designated RIHS under E.O. 13224 as a charity that provides financial and material support to Al-Qaeda and its affiliates and simultaneously pursued a UNSCR 1267 designation, which remains pending. The GOK continues to oppose designation of RIHS, citing the need for "actionable evidence" as opposed to "suggestive intelligence." Absent such evidence, the GOK is unlikely to move on RIHS, and the dispute has complicated other CT cooperation efforts.

GTMO Detainees

¶12. (C) Obtaining the return of the four remaining Kuwaiti Guantanamo detainees has been raised at every senior bilateral meeting in recent years, reflecting strong public pressure on the GOK. Galvanized by the President's commitment to close GTMO by the end of this year, the GOK has put considerable effort into developing a rehabilitation center for religious extremists, which closely follows the Saudi model. I toured the GOK facility on June 18 and found a rather impressive physical plant (due for completion within two months) backed by a program of psychological and religious counseling aimed at restoring detainees to a state of "normalcy" within six months. The GOK maintains that it has the legal authority to hold the detainees for six months prior to sentencing, clearly anticipating that some or all of the detainees will be rehabilitated within this period. The GOK also claims confidence in its ability to monitor the detainees effectively post-release to ensure they do not resume terrorist activities. A DOD team charged with defending one of the GTMO detainees visited the facility on June 8 and later gave a press conference in which they asserted the innocence of their client. The GOK will respond angrily and publicly if the U.S. opts to release Kuwaiti detainees to a third country, given their understanding (apparently from their ambassador in Washington) that a Saudi-type rehab center was the "quid pro quo" for their

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return to Kuwait.

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